

Message Text

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TAGS: SHUM, PINT, RP
SUBJECT: THE CARDINAL AND THE PHILIPPINE POLITICAL SCENE

1. SUMMARY. HIS EMINENCE, JAIME L. CARDINAL SIN, ARCHBISHOP OF MANIL, SPOKE OUT JANUARY 19 ON CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN HIS MOST EXPLICIT PUBLIC STATEMENT TO DATE ON THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL SCENE IN THE PHILIPPINES. THE OCCASION WAS AN ECUMENICAL EXECUTIVE CLUB BREAKFAST WITH A SPRINKLING OF SENIOR GOP OFFICIALS AND FORMER POLITICIANS PRESENT. THE AMBASSADOR ATTENDED. THE CARDINAL WAS MEASURED IN HIS ADVOCACY OF THE MIDDLE WAY, ELOQUENT IN HIS COMMITMENT TO "REPUBLICAN FORMS AND DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES" AND FORCEFUL IN HIS WARNING AGAINST FAILURE TO TRANSFORM TODAY'S PROMISES INTO TOWMORROW'S REALITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. THE CARDINAL BEGAN WITH A DISCUSSION OF THE NEED FOR ORGANIZATIONS, SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS, TO RENEW AS WELL AS REMAIN TRUE TO THEMSELVES, AND THE TENDENCY FOR THEIR MEMBERS TO BE LABELED AS LIBERALS/LEFTISTS, AS MODERATES/MIDDLE-OF-THE ROADERS OR AS CONSERVATIVES/RIGHTISTS DEPENDING UPON ATTITUDES TOWARD CONTINUITY AND CHANGE.

3. THE CARDINAL REJECTED A GOVERNMENT DISPOSITION TO LABEL
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CHURCH LIBERALS AS "CHRISTIAN LEFT," AND LUMP THEM WITH MARXISTS. HE ARGUED THAT "CHRISTIAN LEFT" IS A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS AND THE CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES BY LIBERALS IN THE CHURCH PREVENTS "POLITICAL LEADERS FROM LAPSING INTO COMPLACENCY OR FALLING INTO EXCESSES," WHICH IS A FUNCTION OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE "PARTICULARLY DURING THESE TIMES OF MARTIAL LAW."

4. THE CARDINAL ACKNOWLEDGED THAT MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROADERS BELIEVE THAT THE SITUATION IN THE PHILIPPINES BEFORE 1972 WARRANTED "DRASTIC REMEDIAL MEASURES. AND IF THOSE MEASURES TOOK THE FORM OF MARTIAL LAW, THEN SO BE IT. IT IS ALL RIGHT--PROVIDED THAT MARTIAL LAW IS NOT PROLONGED INDEFINITELY, PROVIDED IT IS LIFTED AS SOON AS THE SITUATION WARRANTS IT." PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE, HE SAID, ARE HOPEFUL THERE WILL BE ELECTIONS THIS YEAR, AND THEY "GO ALONG WITH THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT THAT WITH THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BATASANG PAMBANSA THEN MARTIAL LAW WILL BE LIFTED." IN OTHER WORDS, THE GOVERNMENT "SHOULD BE BASICALLY REPUBLICAN IN FORM AND DEMOCRATIC IN SUBSTANCE--BUT IT SHOULD RENEW ITSELF BY PURGING ITSELF OF CORRUPT AND AVARICIOUS ELEMENTS. IT SHOULD RENEW ITSELF BY STRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS, BY GIVING GREATER ATTENTION TO JUSTICE, BY WORKING MORE DEDICATEDLY FOR THE CAUSE OF PEACE."

5. CARDINAL SIN POINTED OUT THAT PHILIPPINE CONSERVATIVES WERE BROUGHT UP TO BELIEVE THAT THE AMERICAN SYSTEM WAS BEST AND CLOSED THEIR MINDS TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT ANOTHER FORM MAY BE MORE COMPATIBLE WITH PHILIPPINE ASPIRATIONS. LIBERALS ON THE OTHER HAND "ARE SIMPLY AGAINST THE PRESENT REGIME" BUT HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE TO OFFER. WHEN THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP DOES SOMETHING PRAISEWORTHY, (MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROADERS) COMMEND THE LEADERS.

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WHEN IT ERRS--LIKE WHEN IT DENIES PEOPLE THEIR BASIC RIGHTS--THEY ARE UNDAUNTED IN THEIR CRITICISM."

6. THE CARDINAL EMPHASIZED THAT THOSE IN THE MIDDLE ARE PATIENT ONLY UP TO A POINT. "THEY ARE PATIENT WHILE THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT THE PROMISES OF TODAY WILL BECOME THE REALITIES OF TOMORROW, BUT THE MOMENT THEY REALIZE THEY ARE BEING DECEIVED, THEN THEY LEAVE THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD AND GO TO THE LEFT. AND THERE CAN BE NOTHING BUT TROUBLE--PERHAPS EVEN VIOLENCE--SHOULD THIS HAPPEN." THE CARDINAL WARNED THAT NO ONE AND NOTHING, "NOT EVEN A SOLDIER POINTING AN ARMALITE AT THEIR BACK WILL MAKE THEM STAY IF THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT THEY ARE BEING DECEIVED OR BEING USED."

7. COMMENT: IT WAS A MAJOR POLITICAL STATEMENT COMING FROM CARDINAL SIN, AND HIS MOST EXPLICIT PUBLIC POLITICAL COMMENTARY TO DATE. IT WAS BALANCED AND, IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT, HARD-HITTING IN DIRECT EXCEPTION TO CONVENTIONAL GOP WISDOM CONCERNING THE CHRISTIAN LEFT, AND CLEAR WARNING AGAINST ENDLESSLY SPINNING OUT MARTIAL LAW. MANY PERSONS HAVE WONDERED AND SOME HAVE EXPRESSED

DOUBT ABOUT THE ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS OF CARDINAL
SIN TO GO BEYOND A DEFENSE OF ECCLESIASTICAL INSTITUTIONS
AND A QUIET OMBUDSMAN CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS INTO THE
REALM OF OVERT POLITICAL INFLUENCE. NOT ONLY THE CARDINAL
WILL BE WATCHING CLOSELY FOR REACTIONS TO HIS STATEMENT
TODAY.
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